

Till The End of the Four Seas

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Till The End of the Four Seas

by [SithPlum](#)

Summary

“Come with me.”

This wasn't the first time Buggy had heard the words. It wouldn't be the last.

Or: 5 times Shanks asks Buggy to come with him and one time he doesn't.

Notes

Hello! While this isn't my first time writing Buggy, it is my first time writing this ship. I am not a manga reader so I hope I do these characters justice. All comments/constructive criticism is appreciated!

Happy reading :)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“Come with me.”

This wasn't the first time Buggy had heard the words.

He frowned at the red-haired *Yonkou* staring him down, a flicker of desperation in the other's gaze. They were standing on the shore, Shanks' ship was docked a few yards away. Their crew had left the pair alone, off partying on the other side of *Karai Bara* Island. Buggy bit back a groan- he should've seen this coming.

The moment the other stepped on the island, Cross Guild poster in hand and intent in his eyes, Buggy had known what the redhead wanted. Crocodile and Mihawk had quieted instantly when Shanks had docked at Buggy Town- their torture coming to a temporary standstill. Something Buggy was infinitely grateful for even though it stung his pride that Shanks' presence was enough to quell Crocodile's cruelty. The other was always perceived as more of a threat, more of a pirate, more of a captain. *More*.

More than Buggy. Always.

Something bitter curdled in the clown's chest at the thought. Thirty years later and Shanks was still seen as more than Buggy- nothing had changed since Roger's ship. He'd never measure up to the other no matter how much he did, people would always notice the other.

“Buggy.”

The name rolled off his tongue with so much reverence but Buggy knew better.

He knew to be untrusting of the other's words. Shanks had always been better at manipulation between the two of them. Even on the *Oro Jackson*, he had people dancing in his palm, giving him everything he asked for.

How could they not?

Shanks had a magnetic pull. What Shanks wanted, he would get. People would rush to give him everything just to bask in his attention some more.

Well, Buggy had refused to be part of that crowd back then, and he refuses to be part of it now.

“No.”

This wasn't the first time Shanks had heard that answer.

1

Marineford had been a mistake.

Buggy barely remembered much other than the monkey pest creating a ruckus and Shanks playing him like a fiddle, acting like nothing had changed. Like nothing had happened. Like they weren't seeing each other for the first time after 10 years.

Shanks hadn't said much on their way back, the weight of a decade apart sitting heavily between them, it had rendered the *Yonkou* mute. Except for:

“Come with me.”

“No.”

And that had been that.

2

“You’re it!”

The words were exclaimed with a loud splash as Shanks dumped a bucket of water right onto Buggy’s head. The younger let out an angry cry and split into pieces, body scattering and shooting to the sky while his feet remained glued to the deck.

“Damn you, Shanks!”, Buggy screeched, immediately chasing after the grinning cabin boy, grabbing a bucket of soapy water to return the favour.

Shanks rounded a corner, gleefully laughing the whole time and Buggy was quick to follow, throwing the bucket at the boy.

Unfortunately, Buggy’s bad luck decided to interfere at that very moment- the bucket sailed harmlessly over Shanks’ head and instead doused Rayleigh who had exited the ship’s galley at that very moment.

Both boys came to a screeching halt, eyes wide as saucers, staring as water and soap suds slowly dripped down Rayleigh’s face- forming a small puddle beneath the man. He stood, unmoving, at the doorway as bubbles clung to his face. Buggy was first to bolt, speedily flying to the crow’s nest to escape the first mate’s wrath. Before he could get any higher though, a pair of arms grabbed onto his torso.

Buggy looked down to see Shanks gripping him tight, panic clear in the other’s gaze, “Oi, take me with you!”

“Are you crazy?! Let me go!”, Buggy fiercely tried to wriggle out of the other boy’s iron hold, but to his dismay, Shanks didn’t even budge. “Knock it off, Buggy! Quick, take me with you!” He dragged Buggy further down, the clown bit back a groan- he couldn’t carry this oaf!

Before Buggy could split into smaller pieces to escape Shanks and Rayleigh- a heavy fist came down on his head. Shock sewed Buggy’s body back together as he lay on the deck, groaning. Another knock resounded in the air and Shanks dropped next to the younger, clutching his head.

That day, the pair were forced to scrub the deck fifteen times- Buggy’s hands were trembling by the seventh round and he’d split into pieces after the twelfth round. His body was strewn around the gleaming, polished deck and Buggy was too tired to bother putting himself back together. Instead, he laid there, exhausted and staring at the purpling sky as night approached.

“It was just a little soap water- how bad could it be?”, Shanks grumbled, throwing his mop aside with a careless toss. Buggy hummed, closing his eyes, he felt like he was floating- a little nap couldn’t hurt...

“When I have my own ship, I’ll be a better captain.”, Shanks’ clear voice cut right through Buggy’s daze- the red-haired boy was sitting right next to Buggy’s torso, a small collection of his limbs in his lap. Gently, Shanks pieced Buggy back together, talking away the whole time. “No one would ever get any punishments on my ship- everyone will joke around and be happy. I’ll make sure of it! I’ll start by choosing a first mate who isn’t a hardass that can’t handle a little prank.”

The stars were coming out now, Buggy watched their twinkle as Shanks worked through his body- ensuring to slot every piece with a gentle care that he was only capable of showing in rare, quiet moments like these.

“Someone who can prank the crew with me, someone who wouldn’t give cabin boys harsh punishments, someone *funny*. ”, Shanks continued listing qualities. Buggy sat up, near complete, and wondered what kind of first mate he would choose for himself when he becomes Buggy The Great and Bombastic Captain.

Maybe someone with enough charm to make up for Buggy’s flaws. Enough charisma to pull in people who wouldn’t take him seriously for his big red nose. Distantly, he thought back to a realisation he’d had two weeks ago.

Captain Roger was proud of Shanks.

Buggy watched as the taller leaned down and patted the boy’s head fondly as the crew ran around carrying spoils from the latest raid. Buggy and Shanks had been allowed to participate. The pair had made a good team- Buggy managed to lure a chunk of the crew into traps and Shanks’ waiting blade. Roger had grinned at Buggy in approval and it lit up his insides in a warm glow.

The warmth persisted as Buggy sat on the railing, watching Shanks animatedly describe his and Buggy’s plans to Roger. Two crew members near Buggy paused in their movement to take in the sight. “He did pretty well today.”, one of them smiled. “Yeah, little runt is gonna be a great captain someday.”, the other grunted, dropping the heavy chest he was carrying.

Buggy tilted his head, waiting for the pair to acknowledge his efforts.

They didn't notice him, however, and continued.

"Did you see how bravely he took on those forces?"

Buggy frowned. He'd ensured to tire out those pirates in a chase before leading them to Shanks.

"And those traps? Genius."

Traps that Buggy had set.

"There's no doubt about it, the kid is destined for greatness."

Buggy's mouth soured, bitterness snuffing out the warmth in his chest. He wanted to ask "What about me?", but the pair hadn't seen him. Their gaze remained firmly stuck on Shanks. Buggy tracked the way other crew members smiled at Shanks, pride lining their mouths and lifting their shoulders- how many had given him such looks?

With a startling chill, Buggy realised that no one apart from the captain had even noticed him.

Not a single crew member had clapped his back with praises on their lips about his tactics. No one had warmly congratulated Buggy on his first raid being successful. Even their captain had merely smiled at Buggy before making his way to Shanks to praise him verbally.

Doubt's icy tendrils curled around Buggy's heart. How could he be sure that Roger had smiled at him in approval? Was it just a smile in passing? One of his customary grins to greet his crew members?

Had he noticed Buggy at all?

Had anyone?

“I did plenty too, you know!”

The pair turned, startled to see the indignant little boy sitting on the railing. Then one of them raised an awkward hand to his neck, “Right...I’m sure you did.”

“I did! I was the one who set those traps and I was the one who chased those pirates into Shanks’ sword!”

The taller of the two scoffed, lips twisting into a sneer, “I thought that Rayleigh had taught you to stop lying. We know you were floating high above while Shanks protected you, pipsqueak.”

“Gin!”, the other one gave his friend a sharp look, “Lay off the kid.”

“He needs to hear the truth.”, the taller shrugged.

Buggy’s face burned scarlet in anger, “That’s not true! I did just as-”

“Oh really? And how did you ‘chase away’ these pirates? Bet they went running as soon as they got a glimpse of that big red nose!”

“What did you say about my nose?!”

“Enough! Look, your tall tales are interesting during a boring day but you gotta know when to stop. We like listening to your stories but this is just embarrassing. Just admit you’re jealous of Shanks.”, the shorter of the pair snapped at Buggy.

Almost immediately, an apologetic look coloured the other’s face, “Ah, I’m sorry- that was harsh...you’re a fun kid, Buggy, all of us love your antics, bud. Sure, you ain’t a pirate right now but I’m sure you can be a great pirate too someday!”

Blinding anger and hurt rendered him mute and Buggy pushed off the railing, anger churning in his gut, no longer being able to watch as crew members approached Shanks with a variety of smiles. No one noticed as Buggy quietly slipped away. He realised that no one would. Not when

Shanks was around. The other would always be at the centre. Always ahead of Buggy.

Frustrated tears pricked at Buggy's eyes, why wouldn't anyone believe him?

That night, as he laid in bed, Shanks settling into the cot above him, Roger poked his head in through the door with a bright grin.

"Good job today.", he said simply before shutting the door and blowing out the light.

Above him, Shanks let out a content sigh, no doubt feeling giddy with their captain's praise. Buggy would have felt the same but he couldn't tell if the captain had been speaking to both of them or just to Shanks. It didn't matter even if he had been talking to both of them. Deep inside, he knew who the words were truly for- Roger hadn't noticed Buggy crying in the crow's nest, sitting high above the cheerful party.

That had been enough for Buggy to confirm what he'd known all along. When Shanks was around, no matter what he did, he'd never be seen. He was just an afterthought. A clown to entertain the crew. He didn't have any value beyond that.

The warmth in him had shrivelled up and no smile from Roger could light it again.

"...someone loud and cheerful-hey, you'd be pretty great first mate, Buggy!"

"Huh?"

Buggy snapped out of the bitter memory and turned to Shanks, briefly noting that his body was complete. The red-haired cabin boy had an excited gleam in his eyes as he grabbed onto Buggy's shoulders.

"When I become a captain, you'd come with me, right?"

What?

Buggy tilted his head, mind still torn between the past and the present. He shook his head to clear all his thoughts, “What?”

“Come with me!”

Acid immediately flooded Buggy’s mind, dissolving all thoughts and turning it into a fizzling mess. Buggy? Under Shanks’ captaincy? Becoming one with all the adoring masses that only ever noticed Shanks and never had room for anyone else in their sight?

“No!”, the word tumbled out of Buggy with a ferocity unlike him.

At once, Shanks’ smile dimmed. His grip loosened on Buggy’s shoulders and the younger stood up. Buggy’s mind swirled with thoughts of a future wherein he would stay stuck in Shanks’ shadow. Even in this future, the crew would never see Buggy, they would never notice his efforts. They would reduce him to a clown for entertainment and isn’t that what Shanks wanted?

For Buggy to entertain him while he became a great pirate captain?

Buggy would rather jump into the sea.

Instead, he turned and fled to the crow’s nest, leaving behind a confused Shanks. In his rush to get away, he failed to notice the hurt shining in Shanks’ gaze.

Roger’s execution is a black spot in Buggy’s mind. He remembers it in pieces.

Rain.

Blood.

Tears.

“Come with me.”

Ego. Even here, when Buggy’s heart laid in pieces high up on the execution platform- Shanks had enough pride to ask him. To let the stupid question loose. Bitter, black feelings clattered behind Buggy’s teeth and he couldn’t tell if he was shivering from grief or anger. He clenched his fingers into loose fists- feeling the urge to tear, to break, to ruin.

He’d known, when Roger had walked up those steps, when the blades had pierced him, when Shanks had turned to him with his insufferable pride, asking him that question, that something would break.

That *something* between them was teetering, close to shattering but being held in place by this moment.

All of their time together, all their memories, laughter and tears- everything that tied them together was close to snapping. Buggy felt the weight of his answer press down on his ribs.

“No.”

He felt something in him shatter at his own response.

As if to punctuate the finality of it, the skies tore open and rain poured down on the town- washing away blood, anger and tears. Roger’s hat covered Shanks’ eyes and Buggy couldn’t see the emotion in them. He didn’t want to. He knew it would haunt him if he did. He could nearly hear the sound of something splitting apart and realised that blood was dripping from his clenched fists- nails biting deeply into the soft flesh of his palm. The rain washed it away, mixing it with the blood from the execution platform and Buggy felt grief crack open a pit in him again.

He turned from Roger’s body, from the scattered pieces of his old crew, from Shanks and ran.

Part of him was grieving the death of something else.

“Come with me”, the familiar words were paired with a roll of Shanks’ hips.

Buggy groaned as the other hit his sweet spot dead on and he glared at the redhead’s grinning face- clearly aware of the effect he had on Buggy. They’d started this... *arrangement* a couple of years ago when the pair had met each other on a random port, both young, both captains.

Buggy had watched Shanks’ crew run around and was surprised to note a lack of familiar bitterness curling in his lungs. Well, he supposed, there wouldn’t be any need for jealousy here.

Buggy had his own crew of adoring idiots now.

He’d been slightly nervous when he’d first spotted that mop of red hair- their last meeting had been accompanied by rain and blood and the memory brought a sour tang to Buggy’s mouth. Shanks, however, had only paused for a second upon seeing Buggy- something flashing in his gaze- before splitting into a big grin and approaching the Clown Captain.

A heavy hand thunked down onto his back, “Buggy! It’s been a while, old friend!”

Buggy stared at the bright grin, struck by how much it resembled Roger’s and had barely managed to snap out of it to grumble out a response, “Still as overly familiar as ever, huh, Shanks.”

He carefully ignored how his own heart rate had picked up at the warm touch and how his eyes could hardly leave the other’s face. Of course, Shanks grew up to be a handsome bastard, Buggy scoffed internally.

The other captain’s gaze softened at the rebuttal, arm claspng Buggy tightly as if he was afraid the other would run. “You never change, do you?”, there was an unmistakable fondness in the question and Buggy grunted to cover up how the tone had sent a rush of warmth to his face.

“Say, I picked up quite a lot of booze at my last raid- wanna share it?”, if Buggy hadn’t known better he would’ve said that Shanks sounded hopeful. He laughed at the thought- Shanks hoping for Buggy’s company was absurd.

However, Buggy hadn't had good booze in a while...

"How good is it?"

"The best."

Shanks' smile was confident and Buggy couldn't lie that he had missed his former friend's company so against his better judgement he agreed.

And that's how he found himself sitting between Shanks' knees, leaning back on the other's warm chest and laughing loudly as the alcohol took effect. The other captain hadn't lied, the booze was good. Real good.

Buggy's and Shanks' crew dotted the area, laughing and chatting cheerfully. The two captains had decided to stay in a slightly secluded corner, keeping an eye on their men as they drank. However, Buggy could hardly keep an eye on his men with Shanks in front of him. His more-than-tipsy mind kept cataloguing all the ways Shanks had (and hadn't) changed.

Over the years, the other had filled out his frame, becoming broader than Buggy's lithe frame and had shot up a couple inches. His face maintained that same, boyish look even though the new scar added a bit of roguish charm (Buggy drank and blamed the alcohol for the red colouring his face). He'd lost his teenage irritability, smiling fondly or laughing whenever Buggy would try to pull him into an argument.

Words that would have had a younger Shanks shooting over the table and tackling Buggy now had him throwing his head back in a loud laugh and wrapping a thick, muscular arm around the smaller's shoulder.

The clinginess, at least, hadn't changed.

Shanks had always been needy- tossing an arm around Buggy's shoulders, clambering into his bed on occasion in the Oro Jackson, tugging at Buggy's hair- never leaving Buggy's side for longer than necessary. They were glued at the hip. Wherever Buggy was, Shanks would never be far behind.

Except now, the touches, just like Shanks, had transformed. They were slower, more deliberate.

A warm palm dragging across Buggy's nape, a puff of breath against the shell of his ear whenever Shanks leaned close (too close) to whisper something, a heavy weight settling around his waist as Shanks dragged him around to meet members of his crew.

Buggy had ignored how his heart would leap to his throat at each lingering touch. How his face was flushed for more reasons than the alcohol. How as he stared at Shanks, the other was staring back with a similar heat in his eyes. How easy it would be to just give in...

No, this was a mistake. Buggy's dull mind tried to shake off the thoughts. He couldn't do this. Not with Shanks. Not with everything that had happened. He stood up and immediately the world tilted. Oh, he was falling, how did that happen-

Before he could crash to the ground, Shanks caught him in a firm grip. Buggy's breath hitched as the display of strength and the red-haired captain shifted their position to the ground, ensuring to settle Buggy between his knees- bracketing him with muscular thighs and leaning him back onto a sturdy chest.

"I got you, Buggy.", the other grunted into his ear, leaning over to bring Buggy's bottle to his lips. The clown captain watched the way Shanks' throat rippled as he took a long drink and felt his blood rush south.

Booze melted his inhibitions like sugar and he leaned up and dragged his fingers over Shanks' scar- gently pressing over his eyelid and tracing down his jaw. His thumb finally settled on the other's lips, resting against the plush bottom lip. Buggy couldn't tear his eyes away, nerves sparking with desperate want.

A calloused palm circled Buggy's wrist and the clown's breath caught as grey eyes settled on his. Shanks held his hand in place as he opened his mouth and bit his thumb lightly- the pressure shooting electric need down Buggy's spine. Everything quieted in Buggy's mind, alcohol dulling the sharp edges of their rocky history. He doesn't know who leaned forward but Buggy remembers feeling the world dissolve into sea foam when Shanks' lips met his own.

And since then, they'd kept up the routine.

It would start with slow touches and heated gazes and always ended with Buggy waking up

wrapped in strong arms with a sore ass. Shanks wouldn't say much outside of his usual praises and the occasional insult that shot wanton need through Buggy's veins whenever they slept with each other but this time was different.

They were in Buggy's cabin, crew partying loudly outside. Shanks had been glued to Buggy's side all day, driving Buggy up the wall with teasing touches till the other finally gave in and dragged the larger man to his quarters. This was familiar- they'd done this countless times before. Until:

“Come with me.”

Buggy opened his eyes and glared at Shanks.

They were both captains with their own crews- why was he bringing up that old, prideful statement?

Despite his infuriating smile, there was a hint of something desperate as Shanks stilled, his hand gripping Buggy's face tenderly as he repeated, “Come with me.” Perhaps it was the desperation. Perhaps it was because they were still connected-Shanks still dragging against Buggy's prostate- but the clown captain didn't bite back with a sharp response.

Buggy considered it for a moment, giving up captaincy and joining Shanks- being able to do *their routine* more regularly. Not having to wait till they chance across each other at a random island. Being able to enjoy Shanks' company whenever he wanted to...

Somewhere in the middle of their arrangement, Buggy had found himself wanting...more.

He was a creature of greed. Always seeking more. He wanted to have all of Shanks' attention, all of his smiles, all of his warmth. All of it, every little bit of Shanks, Buggy wanted to have it. He wanted to have more than these stolen moments.

Except, Shanks would never give that to him.

Buggy knew that their arrangement was nothing more than stress relief for the other.

Sometimes, a dark voice in Buggy's head would whisper that Shanks only slept with him to appease his ego. To tell himself that he'd finally managed to get Buggy to submit to him after years of trying. He would shake away those thoughts fiercely every time because as prideful as Shanks was, he wasn't cruel.

Now, the voice was back, whispering intensely that this was a ploy- that Shanks had been planning this so that he could finally get the clown to join his crew. That he still wanted Buggy to entertain his whims and perhaps even as an occasional bed warmer. That he wouldn't have cared about the clown if he hadn't persistently resisted the other.

What Shanks wants, he gets.

No.

Buggy wouldn't play that game. As much as he wanted Shanks- Buggy was, after all, a creature of greed. He wanted more. More than Shanks. He wanted to carve out his name in history as the Great Bombastic Clown Captain. He wanted to have all the treasure the four seas had to offer. He wanted to be feared, to be seen for the threat he truly was.

He wanted this and this and this, more than he wanted Shanks.

And so, Buggy gripped the palms holding onto his face and pulled them away, leaning forward so his face would be level with Shanks. The other's eyes shone with an unreadable emotion (not hope, Buggy wouldn't be fooled- it wasn't hope) as Buggy got closer.

"No."

Apart from an imperceptible crack in Shanks' smile- the other didn't say anything. He simply used their new position to resume their activities, pushing all thoughts out of Buggy's mind.

Afterwards, if he'd held a little tighter onto Buggy- the clown didn't mention it.

“You hate me.”

The phrase was slurred and bitter.

Buggy froze, the place stank of alcohol. Ben, Shanks' first mate, had warned him of their captain's dim mood but it did little to prepare Buggy for the sight of the large, usually grinning man to be sprawled out behind a bar, bottles littered around him. They'd been docked at this island for a week apparently, Ben had said that after their last encounter (three months ago) Shanks had been quieter.

“Capn’s been sulking around the ship and no amount of booze or raidin’ is gettin’ him out of it. The crew’s been walkin’ on damn eggshells for the past month. Whatever it is, I’m sure you’re connected to it so go talk to ‘im and fix it.”

The first mate had been brusque and before Buggy could say anything, Beckmann had turned and walked off.

Cupid’s Den the wooden signboard read and Buggy huffed a laugh. Typical.

At first, the clown had considered not entering the bar that Shanks had drunk dry but...if what Ben claimed was true, a sombre Shanks spelt trouble. And when he was in the mood for trouble, he tended to drag everyone around him into it- Buggy included. So, with a sigh, the Captain entered Cupid's Den.

The place was dimly lit, a couple of candles around the place were the only source of flickering light, and the place looked like a hurricane had ripped through it. There were overturned tables and shattered glass all over the place.

“Oi shithead, you still here?”

“O’er heeeere!”, a voice sang out from behind the bar. Unwilling to step on the shards of glass- Buggy detached his torso and floated towards the counter. As he came closer, the stench of alcohol got stronger and a tuft of red hair peeked over the bar.

“Bugs!”, the idiot grinned at him.

The red-haired pirate was surprisingly drunk. Drunker than usual. Buggy could tell from the flush colouring the other's cheeks and the way he leaned heavily onto the shelves, gaze unfocused. That was quite a shock, Beckmann had been right in being worried. Sure, Shanks drank a lot but very few had seen the Captain *truly* wasted. His tolerance was unfortunately strong- something he had smugly held over Buggy's head in their teenage years.

"Buuuugs- c'mere!", Shanks leaned forward, trying to grab ahold of Buggy. The clown floated out of reach, nose scrunched in disgust at the smell. God, did the idiot bathe in the booze? Damn Beckmann, he was a fool for believing him, Shanks was still a giddy idiot. Drunker than usual but he sure as hell wasn't gloomy.

However, the moment Buggy had floated back, Shanks' face fell. The Captain reached for him again only for Buggy to float higher.

"Don't you dare, you'll get your stink on me, damned idiot!"

"C'mooooon Bugs-"

"I shouldn't have bothered coming here, you're perfectly fine. What a waste of time.", Buggy groused, still floating out of reach.

It was an empty threat, Beckmann's concern had rubbed off on Buggy after all but Shanks' reaction was instantaneous. In a moment he looked smaller, shoulders drawn in tightly, knees tucked in. And then:

"You hate me."

Buggy froze in place. He'd never heard Shanks speak so bitterly before. Buggy sensed something dangerous in his tone (he sensed something broken, something shattered, in it too but he couldn't allow himself to think about it). Unsure of what to do, the clown fell back on his usual response.

"Of course I do! I will never forgive you for the *Bara Bara* Incident, you damn fool!", Buggy snapped, hoping to lighten the mood. A mirthless laugh fell from Shanks' lips and Buggy winced at the hollowness of it. The usual merriness was absent. The empty sound twisted Buggy's insides.

Glazed, grey eyes locked onto Buggy, "You 'ere always a liar." The Captain's usually merry mouth

was set in a grim line, “I used to believe that, you know. That you were lying about hating me! That we were still friends despite-”, the same bitter laugh interrupted. Buggy’s chest cracked at the sound.

“I b-believed we were friends! I’m a damned fool, you’re right, Buggy. A damned fool!”, Shanks laughed again, clutching his side and shoulders shaking hysterically. The sight couldn’t be more *wrong*. This wasn’t Shanks. This couldn’t be. Buggy assembled himself and stepped towards the other, hands stretched out in front of him as if he were placating a wild animal.

“That’s not true...”

A second was all he had to react before Shanks grabbed onto his wrists, holding them in his single hand tightly. The other tugged the Clown low until Buggy was practically kneeling at eye level with Shanks.

“Don’t lie.”, his voice was rough and the storm in Shanks’ eyes reminded Buggy of the rough seas that shattered ships.

Buggy gulped, fear and worry mixing into acid and burning his insides. He’d seen a thousand faces of Shanks. The young, bold boy who rushed into danger recklessly. The smug, smart teenager who infuriated Buggy for fun. The smooth, dashing Captain who’d charmed his way into Buggy’s bed. He’d seen this and this and more.

He’d never seen this hopeless, broken side of Shanks before. Smelling of alcohol and looking at Buggy like he’d strung all the stars in the sky. It felt wrong. Bitter, cruel laughs and teary eyes- it wasn’t Shanks. It was all wrong, wrong, *wrong!*

“You’re wrong, Shanks.”, Buggy’s response was cut short by a sharp chuckle.

“Come with me.”

It wasn’t an invite. It was a challenge. There was a vicious glint in Shanks’ eyes as he said the words, bitter hate curdling their meaning. Buggy’s heart snapped into two at the sight of it. What had become of his friend?

“I’m wrong, aren’t I? Go on, say you’ll come with me.”

“How could you bring this up right now?”, Buggy spat, anger overtaking his sadness.

“You can’t say yes, can you? The idea of being with me is torture, isn’t it?”, Shanks’s voice rose, resentment colouring his tone, “You hate me-”

“I told you that isn’t true!”, Buggy roared back, slamming his head against Shanks. The other didn’t flinch, instead pushing back just as harshly, gaze steadily locked onto Buggy.

“Then why have you been tormenting me?! Why did you give me so much false hope? Why did you keep coming back again and again and again?! Why, Buggy?”

Buggy let out a strangled sound, fury whiting his mind and rendering him speechless. Why couldn’t this buffoon understand him?

Shanks’ grip was crushing and for a moment, Buggy imagined shackles instead of a singular hand wrapped around his wrists. He envisioned the shackles dragging him forward, being led by a chain that Shanks held. The thought of it soured in his mouth. His mind was torn. Shanks looked so desperate, so open- it clawed at Buggy’s heart. And yet. To give in, to let Shanks in, to give him the chain was *defeat*. And Buggy was tired of losing.

Almost immediately, the grip loosened and Shanks was looking concerned. Something splashed onto his wrist. Looking down, Buggy realised that he was crying. Fat tears were rolling down his cheeks and falling onto their joined hands. *Damn it*. Embarrassment swelled uncomfortably in his stomach as he tried to quell his tears. He couldn’t look weak, not right now. He hadn’t cried in front of the other since they were goddamn *kids*-

A gentle hand swept across his cheek, gathering all the tears.

“Buggy...I didn’t mean to- I didn’t want to hurt you. I’ll only ask this once, and then I won’t ask again. I won’t. I’m tired too, Buggy. I can’t bear it anymore. Neither of us can.”

Shanks gripped his chin gently, tilted it up and forced him to look into the other’s eyes.

“Buggy, will you come with me?”

No.

Sorrow sat heavily in his chest, crushing his lungs and suffocating him. Buggy couldn't breathe, couldn't think, couldn't speak.

He remained silent, hoping that would be answer enough.

The Captain sat still next to Shanks, hoping the other wouldn't ask again. Buggy didn't know what he'd say if the other asked again. Yet, Shanks didn't. Instead, he let go of Buggy.

His face morphed into a calm, cold mask. The same one that Buggy had seen him wear in front of his men. It was the face he'd wear when he was being *Akagami no Shanks*, the fearless captain. The ruthless Yonkou. The face that the world was familiar with. The world, but not Buggy. He didn't know why it pierced him to see it directed at him. The Captain stood and turned in a single, final move. Buggy stared at his back as the other left the bar.

“Shanks...I...I'm-”

(The word stayed trapped in his throat. Buggy couldn't force it out. *Why couldn't he just say it, damn it?!*)

“I'm sorry.”

Shanks didn't say a word.

That was the last Buggy had seen of him for ten years.

Buggy turned and walked, uncaring of the other *Younkou* standing on the shore. The Cross Guild would need him soon enough. Crocodile gets bored easily and when he's bored he starts tossing Buggy's men into his beloved Bananawani's mouth.

"I'm going to Laugh Tale."

The words were whispered but to Buggy, they were louder than canons.

Laugh Tale.

Their shared dream. Roger's legacy. Buggy's missed chance.

They had agreed, once they'd become captains, that they would go to Laugh Tale when they were both strong enough.

("Promise me you'll go to Laugh Tale with me.", Shanks was unexpectedly serious. Buggy was surprised at the sudden mention of Roger's legacy. They were sitting aside, watching their crew dance around a blazing bonfire, drinking as usual. Shanks' warm palm cradled Buggy's cheek, tilting his face towards the redhead. "Promise me.")

"Whaddya think you're demanding?", Buggy knocked his forehead against Shanks.

Unsurprisingly, the other hardly flinched at the knock- instead, steel eyes bore into his own, still serious.

That wasn't surprising either, Roger's legacy was highly important to Shanks. Their captain had meant the world to him and Laugh Tale was the one adventure they'd missed out on. And it was his fault. Buggy had always regretted that he was the reason Shanks missed Laugh Tale.

That they hadn't been able to go with Roger on his last adventure. The next time they'd seen Roger it had been...

The Clown felt grief bloom in his gut at the thought of the execution. Despite everything that happened aboard the Oro Jackson, Buggy loved him. He wanted to honour his captain's legacy.

“Buggy.”, Shanks’ voice was rough, and the desperation in it pierced right through Buggy’s heart.

“Fine! You win, but not now. You have to wait till we’re both stronger. When we’re the best, most bombastic captains on the sea- that’s when we’ll go to Laugh Tale!”

Immediately, Shanks’ gaze softened and he laughed at the declaration. He cradled the back of Buggy’s head with one warm palm, pressing their foreheads closer together.

“Fine, it’s a deal.”, his breath mingled with Buggy’s and the air was electric with their promise. Despite himself, Buggy felt himself matching the grin. It was a deal.)

Now Shanks was one of the most feared pirates in the four seas and Buggy was Crocodile’s clown.

Buggy thought his heart couldn’t have broken into more pieces after Cupid’s Den but he was wrong. He felt shame swallow the last of his tattered heart whole.

How could he have ever expected Shanks to wait?

Some things were indisputable. The sun and moon will rise from the east, the stars will never favour Buggy and Shanks will always be the world’s favourite.

Buggy would never reach the other’s level. No matter what he did- he’d always be the scared clown that was permanently cowering in Shanks’ shadow. Never more. He will never be taken seriously, only seen for his nose. He belongs at the bottom, a cowardly clown and nothing more.

Pushing past the heartache echoing in his ribs, Buggy kept his voice level as he responded, “Then go.” He didn’t turn to look at Shanks, he couldn’t bring himself to show the other his face. Instead, he kept his head held high and continued marching forward. He wouldn’t cry, not here, not in front of Shanks. Not again.

“Why them?”

Every single one of his senses was screaming at Buggy to keep walking. To stare ahead, not turn around. *Just keep walking and it will be over.* If he stopped he would be pulled in by Shanks' tide again. He shouldn't (couldn't) stop. There would be no turning back if he stopped.

Unfortunately, Buggy was the world's greatest idiot.

"What?"

"Why did you choose them?", Shanks' voice was level but Buggy was no stranger to the redhead's masks. This one was designed to fool others into missing the storm of emotions Shanks was trying to hide. It didn't work on Buggy ten years ago and it won't work on him now.

"Choose who?"

Accusingly, Shanks held up the Cross Guild poster, clutching it so tight that Crocodile's scowling face had torn into two. The clown scoffed at the silent accusation. Buggy didn't *choose* Crocodile or Mihawk.

They strolled into his life and decided that he was theirs to play with until they get bored of him.

Buggy wasn't strong enough to fight back and the thought of it was humiliating enough- he couldn't imagine saying it to Shanks. It would be another admission of weakness- one that Buggy would never make.

"They're persuasive.", Buggy settled on responding, tossing his shoulders uncaringly and looking away. The lie was an easy one to say. Crocodile's methods were indeed persuasive...in a way.

Shanks didn't need to know about Buggy's Bananawani-shaped nightmares.

"Right.", the bitterness in Shanks' tone was thinly veiled. Buggy felt a familiar anger roll in his gut, frustrated at the *Younkou*'s inability to speak directly.

"If you've got something to say then spit it out. Quit it with the vague bullshit!", Buggy snapped, hands on his hips, annoyed at the other's need to be infuriatingly cryptic. At that, Shanks' mask

dropped and an expression Buggy hadn't seen since they were kids took over.

"Tell me, what is it that Crocodile has that I don't?", Shanks lifted his arm, brows furrowed and Buggy hadn't seen this angry side to the redhead in *years* .

The expression was all at once, familiar and strange.

Ever since they'd grown from bickering teenagers to adults, Shanks had dropped his short temper. Rarely did he frown and it would be rarer still to have him raise his voice and snap. Even in *Cupid's Den*, the redhead had maintained a level voice. Now, though, it seemed like nothing had changed since they were kids as Shanks raised his arm, angrily gesturing with the Cross Guild poster as he lost it.

"Or is it Mihawk? What is it that compels you to stay with them? Tell me, how did they achieve so easily what I have been working years to attain?", Shanks stepped forward, eyes flashing with irritation as he continued his outburst, "Why did you choose *them* ?!"

"Why do you care?", Buggy bit out, anger rising at Shanks' entitlement, "Why does it matter to you who I choose to be with?! It's n-"

"Because I love you, you idiot!"

What?

Buggy's heart stopped as the words crashed into him like a tidal wave, shattering every thought and emotion, leaving behind emptiness in its wake.

Shanks...loved him?

Across him, the redhead stilled, eyes widening as he realised what he said. Taking a step back, Shanks inhaled, trying to compose himself. Buggy remained frozen, mind still trying to process that Shanks, *Akagami no Shanks*, loved him. His childhood friend, his rival, his better- loved *him*. Buggy the Clown. Buggy the Coward. Shanks inhaled one more time, eyes focused on the sand, and Buggy recognised the action- he was trying to put on a mask again. The one that he wore whenever he wanted to hide his feelings.

Not this time.

“Oi...oi, oi, oi. Don’t you dare!”, Buggy split into pieces and flew across the short distance separating him and Shanks- grabbing onto the other’s face and pulling his cheeks harshly. “You are not gonna act all cool and leave like you didn’t just say that! Look at me! What did you just say?”

“It’s nothing, Buggy, drop it.”, Shanks’ tone was flat.

“No! I want to hear it! Tell me what you said!”, Buggy pulled harder, forcing the other to meet his gaze. He wouldn’t relent. Not this time. He needed to know whether it was true. Whether it was possible that Buggy wasn’t the only one between them who wanted more. That maybe, just maybe, Shanks actually had wanted Buggy back.

“No, Bug-”

“Just say it again you stubborn bastard!”

“Why?! So you can have fun rejecting me again?”, Shanks glared at Buggy.

“Again?”, Buggy frowned, trying to remember if there were other confessions that he’d missed. “Did you hit your head too hard? What do you mean ‘again’?”, Buggy’s grip on Shanks’ face relaxed. Could he have forgotten? Impossible, he could never forget a confession from Shanks.

“This isn’t funny, Buggy. Let me go.”

“Do I look like I’m joking?! What are you talking about?”

“You...don’t know?”, Shanks stared at him with wonder, mouth agape. Buggy felt a flush creep up his neck, had he missed something? A single hand grabbed his chin, gently pulling his face down to be level with Shanks, “I asked you to come with me, what did you think it meant?”

Buggy frowned at the cryptic question, “Enough with the enigmatic bullshit- just tell me!”

At that, Shanks huffed out a laugh, seeming more like himself, “Buggy, I have loved you ever since the first night we envisioned being captains. In fact, I can’t remember a time without you. Even when we pictured our future- I couldn’t imagine one without you. I didn’t know the right words to tell you, we were so young, so I asked you to come with me...”

“You’ll come with me, right?”

Buggy’s heart dropped as he realised the meaning behind those words from so long ago. Shanks stared into Buggy’s eyes, his gaze was brimming with what the clown could now recognise was heartbreak. He cursed himself.

How could he have been blind to it this whole time?!

“That had been the first time you rejected me.”

His thumb lightly traced shapes on Buggy’s jaw, brushing right against his pulse.

“After that, it had been at Captain’s-”

Execution.

“Shanks...”

“That time it felt like a hole had opened in my heart. It didn’t matter though, I knew we would cross paths again.”

Buggy gulped, sorrow closing up his throat at the sadness lacing in Shanks’ voice.

“We did cross paths but you were different. You were incredible, Buggy, with a whole crew of men who loved you as you deserved.”, Shanks smiled at the memory, “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little jealous.”

“You never wanted me the way I wanted you, Buggy. So when you’d started our arrangement, I took whatever you were willing to give but I’m a pirate. I’m greedy.”, He punctuated the last statement with a hollow laugh. Buggy wanted to speak. He wanted to tell him that he wasn’t alone, that they were both greedy but Shanks wasn’t done.

“I wanted more so I asked and...I didn’t see you again. You were gone by morning and I hadn’t heard a word from you.”

That morning Alvida had decided to piss off a bunch of marines and it had resulted in a very hurried chase where Buggy had been dragged half-naked back to his ship. Shanks had managed to sleep through the whole commotion.

“Not until Cupid’s Den...and that had been the final straw.”, Shanks stepped back, putting distance between him and Buggy.

“Shanks...”

“I know you never will see me that way but I’m glad for the parts of you that you let me have.”

“Shanks-”

“The Cross Guild-”

“Shanks!”

Buggy cut him off the only way he knew how- with a fierce knock of his forehead. Pain exploded in his temples but Buggy ignored it as he gripped Shanks’ face. For once, Buggy found himself devoid of words. Usually, he’s full of them. Little lies that helped him survive the four seas. Fooling a crew into following him, fooling Crocodile into sparing him, fooling Shanks into thinking he could live without him.

Fooling himself that he hated Shanks.

However, he didn't want to lie. Not anymore.

So he leaned forward, gently pressing his lips against the bull-headed idiot who chased him till the end of the four seas.

The truth was a welcome taste.

It was as electrifying as their first kiss had been, all those years ago, a strong arm circled his waist, pulling him closer. Buggy felt the world tilt as the pair fell heavily onto the sand, still connected. He poured everything his stupid, foolish pride didn't allow him to say all those years into the kiss and Shanks enthusiastically met him in the middle.

"You're an idiot.", Buggy breathlessly said once they broke apart. His *I love you back* painted Shanks' mouth red with smeared lipstick. He dragged a thumb across the mess, fondly looking down at the world's most infuriating boyfriend.

"Your idiot.", Shanks' grin was brighter than all the treasure Buggy had stolen.

"My idiot.", Buggy smiled back.

The world could keep its treasure. Buggy had everything he wanted.

End Notes

Thank you for reading! All comments and kudos are appreciated :)

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